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President downplays harbor mines

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WASHINGTON — President Reagan, speaking during an interview with an Irish television executive, shrugged off the mining of Nicaragua's harbors as "much ado about nothing" and said critics of his Central American policies were sorely misinformed about the embattled region.

"Those were homemade mines that couldn't sink a ship," Reagan said. "They were planted in those harbors where they were planted by the Nicaraguan rebels. And I think that there was much ado about nothing."

Reagan's belittling of the mining contrasts with an international furor that raged less than two months ago over congressional disclosures that the CIA was directly involved in the operation against Nicaragua's leftist government. Congress has condemned U.S. participation and is threatening to block a Reagan administration request for additional aid for Nicaraguan insurgents trying to overthrow the Sandinista government.

The President, never mentioning CIA involvement, said the mining operation had been designed to interdict a "flood" of war materiel being funneled through Nicaraguan ports by the Soviet Union and Cuba to support leftist guerrillas in neighboring El Salvador and to spread revolution throughout Latin America.

The interview was conducted Monday and released yesterday, in advance of a three-day visit this weekend to Ireland, where he is expected to encounter sizable protests over his Central American policies. Reagan critics in Ireland, where interest in the region is high because of ties through missionary work, argue that the administration is on the side of repressive regimes in Central America.

Asked about charges that his administration "has not supported justice sufficiently" in Central America, Reagan said the protesters were "misinformed," victims of Soviet and Cuban propaganda.

"I'm sure they're probably sincere and well-intentioned. But I don't think that they know the situation," the President said.